

Child Care Prepared...

Emergency and Disaster Preparedness

Information for the Early Childhood Professional

Preparing for an emergency or disaster?

Answer the following questions:

1. Does your child care have emergency and disaster plans?
2. Are emergency and disaster drills practiced regularly?
3. Do you know your role in an emergency/disaster?

Knowing the answers to these questions will help ensure that you are fully prepared in the event of an emergency or disaster in your child care. Emergencies and disasters are unplanned and can be shocking. Therefore, being properly prepared can guide you to respond appropriately and help you stay calm in the event of a real emergency/disaster. Remember, you are responsible for the safety of yourself and the children in your care.

Why have emergency/disaster plans?

Having a plan can help you be more prepared before an emergency/disaster. Your child care setting must have written plans that are updated, practiced, and trained for routinely. The more overall experience you have with your plans, the more effectively you will respond in an emergency/disaster.

What emergency/disaster plans and training are needed?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that your child care setting have emergency/disaster plans available in writing for the following:

- Emergency evacuations;
- Shelter-in-place procedures;
- Medical emergencies;
- Injury in transport plans;
- Allergy, asthma and diabetes action plans.

A sample Child Care Emergency Response Handbook is available at: <http://lincoln.ne.gov/>

Keyword: child care

Once your emergency/disaster plans are developed, all child care personnel need to be trained in order to carry out the emergency/disaster plans if necessary.

What if an emergency/disaster happens?

Imagine that a tornado occurs while you are caring for children. The damage is so bad that you are left without running water and electricity. Your structure has been partly destroyed and is no longer safe. Everyone must evacuate. Some children and staff are injured and need immediate assistance. Do you have an alternate site? What do you need to do at this moment? Are you prepared for this situation or for any emergency/disaster?

What is your role in an emergency/disaster?

Before an emergency/disaster occurs, child care staff need to know what their role will be in the event of an emergency/disaster. In advance, staff should discuss, and practice the positions that each person will take in an emergency/disaster. Some examples of role responsibilities include first aid, documentation, and child care. To limit confusion, one person should be put in charge of everyone. A second person should be picked to take over if the person in charge is unavailable at the time.

What is the difference between an emergency and a disaster?

It is important to understand the difference between an emergency, such as an asthma attack, and a disaster, such as a tornado. An emergency is a sudden occurrence requiring immediate action. A disaster is a sudden event causing devastating damage. Both emergencies and disasters can begin suddenly, but disasters usually result in a larger impact to the community when compared to emergencies.

Communicating with families

Communication with the families of the children in your care should be a high priority before, during, and after an emergency/disaster. Before an emergency/disaster takes place, families should be made aware of your emergency/disaster plans. Of most importance is making sure the families know how to contact you and that you

know how to contact the families in case of an emergency/disaster.

An emergency card should be completed and kept on file at your child care setting for each child. Make sure the information on the emergency cards is updated regularly, at least every three months. The families should be told where you would go in the event of an evacuation so they will know how to find their children. Parents need to provide you with written authorization stating who is allowed to pick up their children. Personal identification should be required for any adult picking up a child. Do not allow children to leave with an unauthorized person. Taking these steps ahead of time can help you maintain contact with families during an emergency/disaster.

What to remember in an emergency/disaster

When an emergency/disaster occurs, people will sometimes go into shock and panic. Panicking often results in difficulty thinking, which can lead to a response that is unsuccessful at ensuring safety quickly. Having written plans and supplies available for all staff as well as practicing what to do before a disaster/emergency happens can help prevent this dangerous situation. Here are a few important tips to remember.

- STAY CALM.
- Be prepared.
- Supervise the children; make sure the children are safe.
- Follow your written plan.
- Communicate your plan to parents and staff.
- Assign specific roles to staff.
- Listen to the person in charge.
- Know when to get help.
- Keep the families involved.

After an event

After the emergency/disaster is over, communicate with staff and families about the event. Document the incident and report what occurred to child care licensing or other agencies as needed.

Once the emergency/disaster is over, use what you have learned from the experience to update your plan so you are even better prepared in the event of another emergency.

References and Resources:

Caring for our Children, National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care (3rd ed.). Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

<http://nrckids.org/CFOC3/index.html>

Standard 9.2.4 Emergency/Security Policies and Plans

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)

<http://www.naccrra.org/>

Search: Is Your Child Care Program Ready?

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)

Family Readiness Kit:

<http://www2.aap.org/family/frk/frkit.htm>

American Red Cross

www.redcross.org

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

<http://www.fema.gov/>

FEMA for Kids:

<http://www.fema.gov/kids>

The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network

www.foodallergy.org/

The American Academy of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology (AAAAI)

www.aaaai.org/

Barbara Davis Center for Childhood Diabetes

<http://www.barbaradaviscenter.org/>

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www.dhhs.ne.gov/TogetherKidsFamilies

and

http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/publichealth/Pages/lifespanhealth_childcarehealthconsultation.aspx